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Author's Note

[image][image]

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welcome back, echoclanners ! (and new readers)

you might be wondering, "wait, are you bringing this back ?" and the answer is yes; but not in roleplay form !

after reading back over echoes, echoclan, and blood moon, i realized how much i missed these characters and remembered the plot i had wanted to happen in blood moon. and after careful consideration and countless hours of research, i decided i wanted to bring echoclan back.

i had always wanted blood moon to go a different way, and this is book is that *very* way i wanted it to go. i will finally give echoclan the ending i think it deserves.

disclaimer :
not everyone will like how i portray certain characters, or the way i go about this story. there will be death and betrayal and every character is fair game to have either happen to them. but just know, i care a lot about this story and the cast, and will do my best to do right by every one who was apart of echoclan.

#reviveEchoclan

enjoy the story

(and special thanks to Alina for helping me with so many aspects of this fic!)

———

Allegiances

ECHOCLAN

Leader:
Archangel- white tom with ragged fur and brilliant golden eyes

Queen:
None

Advisor:
Spiderstrike- light black tom with white markings, dim amber eyes, and a pink scar on his muzzle

Healers:
Minktalon- brown-and-orange patched tabby she-cat with white on her muzzle, chin, throat, chest, and forepaws; she has a copper eye, a scarred blind left eye, and a twisted and limp right leg
{ UntoldTa1es }

Slap- skinny, short-furred light brown tom with dull blue eyes. He has freckles of hazel on his cheeks and his right leg is scarred and limp
{ lovelorn-burnings }

Healer's Apprentice:
Lilypaw- long-furred, blue-eyed she-cat with white and almost marbled patterns of orangish-tan, light brown, and black on her pelt
{ hyenaa- }

Camp Guards:
Shadowfire- black-and-white Turkish Van she-cat with dark brown eyes
{ KaiAishi }

Hollowstorm- large long-pelted brown-and-black Maine Coon with

yellow eyes. He has a scar over his eye and his ears are nicked **(Apprentice, Creekpaw*)***
{ Nickie1230 }

Shadefur- broad-shouldered, long-limbed tabby she-cat with sleek charcoal fur. Her eyes are a deep amber color, and she has a few scars that are hidden beneath her fur
{ animewarriorlover }

Stag- large, heavily-built tan tabby she-cat with a bit of white on her chest, muzzle, and underbelly. She has a torn left ear, many scars on her flank, leg, and neck, as well as piercing green eyes
(Apprentice, Hailpaw)
{ poltergeistcorvid }

Wolf- muscular, thick-furred, solid gray tom with a white-tipped tail and amber eyes **(Apprentice, Ashpaw)**
{ @BlazeSun }

Warriors:
Crew- long-haired, dark tabby-calico she-cat mix with yellow eyes and a long tail
{ fatbatratcrabs }

Thunderfang- Maine Coon tabby mixed tom with a large build. He's quite agile despite his mass of muscle. His base pelt is a dark soot-gray color, whilst his tabby markings are black. He has deep amber eyes
{ animewarriorlover }

Leopardgaze- honey-colored she-cat with dark specks on her pelt. She has a slender build, her tail is long, and she has amber eyes
{ @BubblingSprings }

Eveningfawn- tan she-cat with yellow eyes
{ GoneForNowww }

Nightleap- tender-muscled thick-furred gray tabby tom with a cream-colored underbelly. He has one ripped ear, a scar running down his shoulder, and green eyes
{ didemyolo }

Aspenshade- shorthaired, bicolored silver-gray she-cat with cinnamon markings and frosted blue eyes. She has a sturdy frame with tattered scars, the most visible being her sliced ears and long scar taking down her shoulder to her paw **(Apprentice, Harepaw)**
{ hakunacrown }

Daystep- muscular, broad-shouldered light golden tom with short, bulky legs and paws. He has light brown splotches along his spine that mix in with his fluffy coat, and his muzzle, chest and underbelly are snow-white. He has yellow, almond-shaped eyes and a short, fluffy tail. Scars crisscross his shoulder blades and tufts of fur are missing from the side of his neck
{ UntoldTa1es }

Hierophant- light golden tabby she-cat with brown marbled patterns as well as a few speckles around her shoulders and upper forelegs, almost like etchings in wood. She has dark brown socks stretching up to her mid-legs and amber eyes, white markings, and a thin tail
{ UntoldTa1es }

Blair- unusually large, thick-furred, dark brown tabby she-cat with white markings. She has a pale brown undercoat and underbelly, along with pretty blue eyes. She has a dull, torn, black collar on with a silver piece of twoleg material that has the word 'Ellie' on it
{ UntoldTa1es }

Gorsestep- huge pure-white tom with a black spot on his back, tail, and one on his left eye. His eyes are green
{ UltraMagnusTFP }

Crowflight- black tom with a few white splotches and thin and wiry fur. He has a pink nose and striking amber eyes **(Apprentice, Splashpaw)**
{ I_Am_Warriors_Trash }

Lakepoppy- dark blue-gray she-cat with white marks and smudges on her face and a few down her neck. She has a large scar on her shoulder from the battle, and her eyes are a murky greenish-brown color
{ Puddlefern }

Raccoonfang- gray tom with black stripes, a white mask, and blue eyes
{ captainkettlecorn }

Lionstep- large, sandy-colored tom with long whiskers, a thick tail and green eyes
{ bailsoffrails }

Sorrelfire- white she-cat with a few brown spots and green eyes
{ GoneForNowww }

Logwater- muscly-built tom with thick, brown tabby fur and green eyes **(Apprentice, Maplepaw)**
{ @ActualShipwreck }

Sunshadow- tall dirty pale ginger tabby tom with emerald-green eyes and ruffled fur. His tabby stripes are almost dark ginger or light brown, and he has long perched up ears **(Apprentice, Mistypaw)**
{ frondleaf }

Fox- russet-furred tom with a bushy pelt and black legs. His tail is bushy, tipped back, and he has pale green eyes as well as unusually large ears. He has a scar running across his right shoulder **(Apprentice, Stoatpaw)**
{ hyenaa- }

Twistedmoon- massive dark gray she-cat with a very muscular body, lighter gray markings, and black spots on her sides. She has a long fluffy tail along with a scar running down her left shoulder that twists to her lower back. Both of her ears are nicked
{ Shadesoul }

Peonyflight- unusually tall she-cat with a very thin light gray coat, basically a silver tuxedo. She has a long tail, sharp ear-tips, and fierce amber eyes with yellow tints
{ MONQRCHFLI }

Smokeflight- light gray tom with darker gray tabby markings. He has a massive frame, a big bushy tail with a black-colored tip, and blue eyes

{ big-softy }

Elmrose- soft-furred, cream-colored she-cat with a short pelt, giving her a disadvantage in the cold. Her feet are a pretty lilac color that extend up her legs like long socks. She has pure-white paws and the same grayish-lilac color points on her muzzle, tail, and ears. The she-cat's long tail and triangle-shaped face distinguish her as a Siamese Oriental. She has large ears and her eyes are seafoam-green, almost like the color of tropical oceans
{ iWriteWarriors }

Acornbelly- rather pudgy, dark chestnut-furred she-cat with a short pelt. She has a light brown underbelly and yellow eyes
{ -Xiatrix- }

Ravenwater- jet-black she-cat with a white chest, striking blue eyes and long fur
{ SpaceShatter }

Redcloud- well-built, russet-furred tabby tom with large yellow eyes. He has large white paws with an extra toe, a stumpy tail, and big, pointy ears
{ xXxGodzillaxXx }

Nettlewish- dark brown she-cat with ruffled fur and a white muzzle, underbelly, and paws. She has misty greenish-blue eyes
{ GashGhost }

Rosethorn- russet-furred she-cat with a white-tipped tail, a white chest, black ear-tips, black socks, and white toes. She has black stripes under her eyes, a white muzzle, and yellow eyes. She has a long scar on her neck from the war
{ GashGhost }

Jayclaw- tom with a base pelt of rich, golden-brown that's fairly short and usually a bit unkempt. A darker brown travels up his legs like socks then throughout his fur are the same colored stripes. His build is stocky and a bit larger than average, and his eyes are a light blue
{ @Black-Briar }

Whiteclaw- giant, large black tom with huge yellow eyes. He also has one white claw **(Apprentice, Quailpaw)**
{ DiscountHairline }

Sweetmouse- small light gray tabby tom with bright hazel eyes, a long fluffy tail, and short whiskers
{ @Seikiatsu }

Adderpond- lithe, medium-sized, light brown tabby tom with black bunched spots littering his pelt. He has incredibly large ears, his fur is rather long and scruffy, and his eyes are bright yellow
{ robotbrains }

Dandeliongaze- shorthaired ginger-and-white tabby she-cat with sunset-yellow and orange-red mixed eyes
{ Flakeshadow }

Indigostream- black and white tabby tom with short fur, green eyes, and a scar on his collarbone
{ Flakeshadow }

Ridgewater- black tom with white paws, a white muzzle and chest, as well as a white stripe running down his back. He has flecks of white and grayish eyes
{ SpaceShatter }

Deerflicker- daintily-built chocolate-brown she-cat with white flecks on her face and paws. She has a paler brown underbelly, muzzle and tail-tip, as well as bright amber eyes with a hint of yellow. She has a scar under one of her eyes, a split tail-tip, and a shredded ear **(Apprentice, Flamepaw)**
{ Swanshadow }

Fallenfeather- long-legged dark gray she-cat with black stripes and greenish-yellow eyes. She has a white muzzle, underbelly, paws, and tail-tip. She also has a scar on her nose
{ @RainbowGirl955 }

Cuckootail- gray tabby tom, with a distinctive scar located on his chest ; he has amber eyes **(Apprentice, Sunshinepaw)**
{ SerenadingBlackbirds }

Grasstuft- a grey tuxedo she-cat with sea foam green eyes and a dark orange nose ; her tail patterns in four white circles near the tip
{ MONQRCHFLI }

Duskfang- tall, muscular, dark brown tabby tom with smooth fur. he has forest green eyes, a torn left ear, and a scar running down his flank
{ asexual-fingerguns }

Emberstorm- sleek furred, flame colored tabby she cat with lighter orange flecks on her pelt. she has bright green eyes and a long, fluffy tail
{ asexual-fingerguns }

Darkflower- dark, brown fur with black stripes wrapped around paws and belly ; yellow eyes
{ Rainheart_Darkslash }

Deadclaw- a tall black furred tom with hazel eyes
{ Rainheart_Darkslash }

Flickerstream- a pale brown pelted she cat with dark brown speckles covering her muzzle, paws, and tail too ; short fur, brown nose, and large amber eyes
{ Singingbubble }

Frostwind- ginger tabby with white stripes on her back, white dipped paws, and yellow eyes
{ Sansy_Savage }

Alderleaf- a small brindle tom with green eyes
{ WarriorWriter56 }

Brindlestripe- large brown swirled tabby tom with white socks and leaf-green eyes
{ frondleaf }

Subordinates:
Snakeleap- muscular orange tom with dark and light brown spots on his back, a dark brown chest and belly, and a dark brown back leg with a light brown paw. He has gray eyes

{ -scarletwitchh }

Chirpbark- skinny brown tom with a faded and torn collar hanging loosely around his neck. His pendent is scratched but reads the name 'Lee.' He has bright, stunning yellow eyes, tufts of black fur near the top of his head, and black-tipped toe
{ lovelorn-burnings }

Swiftspeck- white tom with black-and-dark-brown splotches. His left ear is shredded, along with his shoulder, which has a very deep scar. He has amber eyes
{ fatbatratcrabs }

Dimflare- dark russet-ginger tabby tom with black paws and stripes inching away from his dark green eyes
{ Losty- }

Cloverpool- light brown tabby she-cat with a white underbelly, tail-tip, paws, and green eyes
{ SnowstormWarrior }

Applefall- light brown tom with light green eyes
{ KatsTie }

Birdcry- light brown she-cat with short and sleek fur; darker brown dapples adorn her back, the top of her head, and her tail. Her stature is small and wiry, and she has long legs as well. Her tail is longer than average, and her face is usually set in an expression that looks rather distant. Her eyes are a brilliant blue
{ hyenaa- }

Snowblaze- fluffy and soft white-furred she-cat with a black circle over her left eye and black-tipped ears and socks. She's unhealthily skinny under her fluff and fur and has greenish-blue eyes
{ GashGhost }

Juniperblaze- sleek, slender blue-gray she-cat with piercing olive eyes
{ @ActualShipwreck }

Ivybreeze- Turkish Calico she-cat with brown eyes

{ KaiAishi }

Breezestorm- light gray tom with white ear-tips and one dark gray paw. He has petal-shaped ears and brown eyes with little green flecks in them
{ big-softy }

Apprentices:
Quailpaw- pale brown tom with soft blue eyes. He has a white splash on his forehead and chest, white paws, and white flecks by his eyes
{ Losty- }

Ashpaw- golden-brown tabby tom with a white muzzle, underbelly and paws. He has light green eyes flecked with gold
{ tinybrokencrystals }

Mistypaw- Maine Coon she-cat with a faded gray coat, black stripes and a white underbelly. Her eyes are a golden color
{ tinybrokencrystals }

Splashpaw- average-sized white tom with black splashes on his thick, short fur. He has green eyes
{ UntoldTa1es }

Hailpaw- pure-white tom with gray dapples and green eyes
{ Singingbubble }

Flamepaw- light ginger tabby she-cat with one white paw and bright green eyes
{ Losty- }

Creekpaw- long-pelted black Maine Coon with brown and white dashes
{ Nickie1230 }

Harepaw- slim she-cat with soft, tan-brown fur ; blue eyes
{ @Wolfgirl1016 }

Stoatpaw- ticked brown tabby tom with a white undercoat, paws, throat, and tail-tip. His eyes are a copper-yellow color
{ gold-chains }

Sunshinepaw- pure white she-cat except for the ginger fur on her face, which parts just above her nose ; yellow eyes
{ Sansy_Savage }

Maplepaw- large, well groomed, long-pelted tabico. his fur is mostly white, with tabico markings on his head, back, and tail ; deep amber eyes
{ lorulians }

Caretakers:
Sparrowblaze- muscular ginger ticked tabby she-cat with white on the bridge of her nose, as well as on her throat and socks. She has yellow-green eyes **(kits are Flowkit, Russetkit, and Angelkit; mate is Chirpbark)**
{ -scarletwitchh }

Swanheart- sleek white she-cat with light gray paws and a light gray tail-tip along with amber eyes **(pregnant with Sunshadow's kits)**
{ SnowstormWarrior }

Kits:
Angelkit- small yet fluffy sleek black tom with a white chest, muzzle, and underbelly. He has white socks, white freckles on his cheeks, back and tail, dull yellowish-green eyes and long ears **(kit of Sparrowblaze and Chirpbark)**
{ lovelorn-burnings }

Flowkit- pale brown tabby she-cat with lighter fur as it travels downward on her body, her underbelly a complete tan color. She has darker brown spots on her back and tail, as well as dark brown toes on her front paws. She has a dark brown spot around her right eye, and the markings seem to drip down to her tan nose. Her ears are dark brown and her eyes are a brilliant green color **(kit of Sparrowblaze and Chirpbark)**

Russetkit- classic ginger tabby she-cat with brown spots, black tufts of fur near her ears, and yellow-green eyes **(kit of Sparrowblaze and Chirpbark)**
{ -scarletwitchh }

Royal Kits:

None

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLAN

Loners:

Kipper- long-furred calico she-cat with grey eyes, long limbs, and deep scars across her chest and face
{ -scarletwitchh }

Milk- a cream colored she-cat with thick, soft fur and freckles of yellow on her cheeks and back ; along with brown splotches littered on her body. she has amber eyes and a torn right ear
{ lovelorn-burnings }

Morningpaw- cream-colored she-cat with white markings on her body ; she has a bushy tail and brilliant green eyes
{ lovelorn-burnings }

Mako- gray tabby and siamese mixed tom with blue points and warm amber eyes
{ KechupCity }

Howler- large, muscular charcoal bengal tom with deep, intense amber eyes

Rogues:

Luna- a long-furred black she-cat flecked with brown flecks ; her eyes are a dim yellow hue and she has a scar across her left foreleg
{ Snakestrike }

Spits- a brown, long pelted tabby pixiebob tom with feral, golden eyes ; he has oak colored stripes on his brown pelt and two, large tufts of fur hanging from either side of his face
{ Vespidae }

Moon (River)- a she-cat with long, well-groomed, silver-gray fur and dark blue eyes ; she has scars that rake across her flank
{ oceanrose- }

Xiva- tall, cream siamese she-cat with light color points and pale

evergreen eyes
{ KechupCity }

Rhoswen- a small, yet rather well built, dilute calico tom with extremely well groomed, soft fur. One eye is green, the other is blue, and yet both are extremely gentle shades. His right ear is nicked
{ lovelorn-burnings }

Kittypets:

Glory- dark, sleek ginger tabby she-cat with bright, orange eyes and a long tail ; she has a dark purple collar around her neck with her name on it
{ @Seikiatsu }

Bear- dark tortoiseshell tom with messy fur, ripped ears, a scarred face and body, a half missing tail, and amber eyes

Prologue: Chirpbark

[image]

PROLOGUE
chirpbark

As soon as Archangel's claws swept through ginger fur, as soon as Waspstar's body fell, Chirpbark swore the air was sucked out of his lungs. He stared, shocked, paws shaking, and for a moment it felt as if he couldn't move.

Time blurred around him, warping the world into dripping colors and sounds. Chirpbark leapt forward, pummeling his feet into the ground, stumbling next to Waspstar and pushing his muzzle into his best friend's cheek. Heavy sobs wrenched from his throat and he cursed the world for this, cursed Archangel for the damage he had done. Most of all... Chirpbark cursed *himself*.

I could've stopped this. I... I could've ended it... He couldn't breathe, couldn't even think about Slap or Sparrowblaze. Words streamed past his lips but he was hardly paying attention, yellow eyes trained on the small rise and fall of Waspstar's chest. "Please..." he managed, choking on his belated breath. "You can't leave me... you can't...!"

Horrified yowls rang through the clearing as more EchoClanners realized what had happened, running to their leader, spitting insults at Archangel. Chirpbark briefly registered Snakeleap and Swiftspeck by their voices, though unlike usual they were thick with emotion, raspy whispers as they spoke their last words to their leader. Waspstar's green gaze was pale and glassy, as if he didn't really know what was happening.

The pain Chirpbark felt for Waspstar was unimaginable. His heart hurt and something inside of him cracked, something Chirpbark wasn't sure was *meant* to crack. A guttural sob escaped his jaws and

he dropped his shaking paws in Waspstar's pool of warm and sticky blood, tears streaming down his face. "Goodbye, old friend," he choked out miserably, unable to speak any further.

By the time Chirpbark's gaze fell back on Waspstar's chest, it was still.

A low wail ripped from Snakeleap's throat as he gazed at his deceased brother. The orange deputy began to lick Waspstar's fur fiercely, as if he'd bring their leader back to life with warmth. "Please, please, please," Snakeleap said desperately, "I can't lose you, I can't live without you!"

"Dad," Swiftspeck whispered, voice low and broken. "Dad, stop." Snakeleap began to break down completely, shoulders heaving with grief. "Snakeleap, stop it! You have to b-be strong right now!"

"Yes," a cold, sly voice cut in, slightly high-pitched with a mischievous lilt. "You must stay *strong*, being EchoClan's deputy and all..."

The clearing went completely silent, Chirpbark most of all. He turned his head toward Archangel, staring at the skinny white tom, looking into those flashing golden eyes and wondering where he went wrong. *I should've killed him when I had the chance. What have I done...?* Chirpbark couldn't believe he'd sensed some strange, underlying connection between them. He and Archangel were nothing alike. *Right?*

In a mere matter of seconds Snakeleap was flying from his place beside Waspstar, screeching as he bowled into Archangel. The two tussled with each other, white and orange fur flying through the air, until Archangel's large paws were planting Snakeleap's head firmly in place with the ground. "Stop!" Archangel snarled, face twisted in rage.

Chirpbark felt someone touch his flank and flinched, snapping his head around. He came face-to-face with Slap, staring at his brother for a moment. A silent *Are you okay?* passed between the two, and Chirpbark could only give a small nod. He would not break now - maybe not ever.

More movement caught Chirpbark's attention, and as he slid his gaze toward the outer edges of the clearing, his hackles began to raise when he saw Sparrowblaze being tugged forward by Wolf. The brute tom laughed as he shoved her forward, and Chirpbark was quick to stabilize his mate before she went tumbling into the ground. "Are you okay?" he demanded in a whisper, almost forgetting he was sitting right next to Waspstar's cold body.

Sparrowblaze didn't answer, eyes instead training on the still form of their leader. Chirpbark's face paled considerably and he looked away, unable to face his mate, watching as more of Archangel's cats - and rogues - pushed EchoClanners into the clearing. Sparrowblaze curled her tail protectively around her stomach, finally spitting out, "What... what now?"

Chirpbark's mouth was dry as he looked back at Archangel. "I don't know."

"Unless you want your precious deputy to die," Archangel spat, claws leaving score marks across Snakeleap's cheek, "then you'd best heed my advice... surrender now, and I swear, nothing else has to happen. No more blood has to be shed."

For some reason, Chirpbark believed him. As he looked at Sparrowblaze and Slap, an instinctive protectiveness came over him - one as a father, one as a mate, and one as a brother. *I must protect my kits. I must protect my family.* Chirpbark swallowed the bile in his throat and glanced at Waspstar, chest clenching. *I have to save them. I can't fail them like I failed Waspstar.*

And so, Chirpbark bowed his head, unnoticeable to any - at least, except Sparrowblaze. His mate stared at him, a look of incredulity on her face, and somewhere inside he thought he saw betrayal. It *hurt.* Chirpbark opened his jaws to explain, to try and offer some sort of apology for his silent submissiveness, but nothing came out. Chirpbark turned away, tail flicking dust into the air, unable to look at Sparrowblaze anymore.

Archangel stood in the center of the clearing, still pressing Snakeleap into the ground, golden eyes glinting as he gazed at the cats gathered around. "Ah... we have everyone here."

Chirpbark followed his gaze, staring at his Clanmates that were standing in unison, expressions hard - but sad. Dimflare and Cloverpool stood side-by-side, Flamekit and Quailkit tucked behind their legs. Birdcry and Minktalon's tails were intertwined as they glared down at Archangel, and underneath them were Lilykit, Splashkit, and Creekkit. Applefall, Swanheart, Juniperblaze, Peonyflight, Redcloud, Whiteclaw, Breezestorm, Snowblaze, and Nettlewish stood together, chins high. Daypaw and Nightpaw stood shoulder-to-shoulder, Eveningpaw slightly cowered behind. Lastly, Chirpbark and Sparrowblaze huddled together next to Waspstar's body, but Swiftspeck, Ivybreeze, and even Slap stared at Archangel, seemingly telling him to do his worst.

And then, Archangel *laughed*. It was deep and guttural, an unnatural sound that made Chirpbark cringe, ears pressing to the back of his head. The EchoClanners seemed unnerved, determined dispositions replaced by something more worried. Archangel's teeth flashed and a wide smile stretched over his face, stilling his expression from ear to ear. "You all are cute - really, you are. The looks on all of your faces is priceless. I do hope someone surrenders for the Clan, though, else things might not go too well..."

"Never!" Snakeleap spat.

Archangel growled and slammed his paw into the side of Snakeleap's face, pressing his cheek deeper into the earth. "What was that?"

"We won't surrender," Dimflare said, stepping forward, Cloverpool's tail resting on his russet-furred shoulder. "We aren't scared of you, Archangel. Waspstar may be gone, but we won't surrender to you or your army. We are together, and for EchoClan, we'll do anything."

Swiftspeck tightened his shoulders, brows narrowing. "For EchoClan!" he yowled.

Minktalon and Birdcry lifted their heads. "For EchoClan!" they repeated.

No... Chirpbark thought, staring wide-eyed at his Clanmates. *What are you doing? You'll get us all killed!*

"For EchoClan!" Juniperblaze and Peonyflight snarled.

"For EchoClan!" Daypaw and Whiteclaw growled.

Sparrowblaze sunk her claws into the ground and tilted her chin forward, ignoring Chirpbark's horrified stare. "*For EchoClan*!" she said, loudest of all.

Chirpbark stared at her, jaw slack. "What are you doing?!" he said, heart hammering brutally inside his ribcage. It felt like the air had been sucked out of his chest once more, except this time his fear was palpable, so noticeable he began to visibly tremble. "Our kits-!"

"I do not want our kits to grow up in Archangel's world!" Sparrowblaze spat, ginger tail lashing. "If we die here, then at least my children won't have to suffer."

"No!" Chirpbark said, voice edged with terror. "Sparrowblaze, please, you don't mean that...!"

She meant it, and worst of all, Archangel had heard her loud call. His golden eyes drifted toward Chirpbark and they narrowed considerably, tail lashing. "Well... I suppose it's never too early for a lesson, hm?" The white tom latched his claws into Snakeleap's scruff and dragged him forward, practically throwing him to the ground in front of Shadowfire. "We'll deal with him later; for now, I think it's time we gather as a true Clan... with me as EchoClan's rightful leader."

Screeches of anger erupted from the crowd, cats beginning to stream forward toward Archangel. The rogues intercepted them, holding them back with brutal force.

"Enough of this!" Archangel spat. "You all are acting like a bunch of kits! Accept that you've been defeated!"

"Never!" Dimflare snarled, writhing against Hollowstorm's grasp.

"Then you will be one of the first to be punished!" Archangel snarled, lips curing into a snarl. "We're returning to camp now. I suggest you all stop struggling unless you want to be punished as well!"

Chirpbark was harshly shoved forward by Shadefur but he hardly noticed, looking at Sparrowblaze. His heart felt like it had shriveled up and died in his chest, and inside was a black hole, swallowing his entire body. He could've felt something akin to shame, but Chirpbark had gone too far - he had to stay strong and protect his family. That's what he was doing, and even if no one else understood, even if everyone else hated him for it, Chirpbark would be able to sleep at night knowing his family was safe and well.

As the EchoClanners were pushed along, the forest seemed to echo their silence, broad and large oak trees spiraling above their heads. Webs of branches cascaded shattered moonlight down to the ground, and the hum of katydids created a harmony through the otherwise quiet territory. Chirpbark felt apprehension tug at his fur, pelt spiking along his back. An owl hooted from above, spooking him greatly, and as he saw the bird's flashing eyes he recognized Archangel's there.

Because Archangel is a predator, and we're no better than his prey. Then what did that make his loyalists? Were they just as harsh and unpredictable as he was? Was he even doing the right thing, being submissive in silence? *Sparrowblaze certainly doesn't think so.* A frown tugged on his lips as the group walked, and some deep part of Chirpbark longed to fight back - fight back for his friends, for Slap, for Waspstar. *But I can't... what can one cat do?*

As the entrance of EchoClan came into view, Chirpbark noticed that the energy had changed drastically. He slowly padded into camp, rubbing shoulders with his mate, looking around at the hum of chatter. Cats he'd never seen before were gathered within EchoClan's walls and Chirpbark swore he could feel his heart leap erratically. *What is this? Who are these cats?* He had little time to dwell before he was being shoved into the middle of camp with his Clanmates, ears pressing back as he looked over at the loyalists. Archangel made his way into view, white fur rippling as he leapt through the air, claws digging into wood as he crawled on to the High Branch. His golden eyes were bright and a small smile was creeping on his face, and any thoughts of rebellion Chirpbark had kept close faded away into the abyss. *These are his recruited cats... and we're completely outnumbered.*

Chirpbark was now completely sure that any hint of rebellion would end in certain death.

"Cats of EchoClan!" Archangel said, voice ringing through the clay walls of camp. Voices died away into the wind and heads turned, blinking eyes trained on to Archangel. Chirpbark could feel his paws quivering with apprehension, wondering what was going to happen to the cats that had blatantly disrespected Archangel. *And that includes Sparrowblaze...* Chirpbark looked over at her and felt his heart throb in his throat, tongue dry like sandpaper. He would usually admire her sharp, determined gaze, but now all he could feel was immense terror for her. *I have to do something!*

"Here today, we have gathered our..." Archangel's eyes glinted as he continued. "*Subordinates*."

Dimflare's lips peeled into a snarl at the name.

"And, unfortunately," the white tom sighed, looking disappointed, "some of them aren't keen on accepting my new role as EchoClan's leader. So, I say they deserve a lesson. Don't they?!"

The rogues gathered in camp yowled out their agreement, Shadowfire and Hollowstorm looking the most interested. Chirpbark shuffled his paws and tried to slide closer to Sparrowblaze, but she shifted away before he could touch her. *Doesn't she see I'm just trying to help her?!* Frustration leaked through his veins until his claws were digging into the ground, and for a moment, Chirpbark wished he was anyone but himself.

Archangel grinned even wider, looking over the EchoClanners. "Why can't all of you be so accepting? Hm? Do you think I want to teach you lessons?" He grunted and flicked his bushy white tail. "For the *blatant* disrespect shown toward me earlier-"

"You killed my uncle!" Swiftspeck cried, outraged. "Our leader!"

Archangel ignored him. "-some of you will undergo a rigorous lesson, and all I can hope is that you begin to change your minds once it is over." He narrowed his eyes and scanned the crowd, appearing disinterested for a moment, as if he actually didn't want

to punish them. "Dimflare, Swiftspeck, Minktalon, Juniperblaze, Peonyflight, Whiteclaw, and..." Archangel glanced at Chirpbark, gaze sliding to his mate, "*Sparrowblaze*..."

Chirpbark tried to swallow his fear.

"You will not be allowed to eat for three full nights."

The world fell out from under Chirpbark's paws, so much so he hardly heard the cries of outrage from his Clanmates. The brown tom froze, so terrified he couldn't even think to breathe. Panic welled up in his chest until he felt a torrent of emotion whirling inside of him. *No, no, no...!* Chirpbark snapped his head toward Sparrowblaze and nearly saw red by the hard, accepting look in her eyes.

He couldn't stand here and let her take it - not anymore, not ever again. Chirpbark threw himself to his paws, clearly ignoring Sparrowblaze's furious glare, wildly meeting Archangel's gaze. "Archangel!" he called, horror laced in his voice. "Please... please listen to me...!"

The white tom tilted his head and silence fell around Chirpbark. He didn't even see the deep laceration in Dimflare's cheek, or the scratch on Birdcry's muzzle. "What is it, Chirpbark?" Archangel said, voice silkily sweet, head tilting.

The brown tom inhaled, teeth clenching until his jaw was locked. "Sparrowblaze... she..." Chirpbark looked at his Clanmates and felt a terrible sorrow, wishing that he could save them in some way. *I'm sorry... I really am. If I could help you all, I swear in SpiritClan's name that I would.* He turned back to Archangel and blew out through his fangs, bowing his head, attempting to appear respectful. "Sparrowblaze is pregnant with my kits, Archangel. Please... if I can step in her place, I will. Just *please* don't punish her."

Chirpbark didn't miss the betrayed looks of his Clanmates, but he wasn't entirely sure he cared. *They don't understand!* The tom raised his head and looked at Archangel, trying to communicate his desperation with his eyes. *Please, please listen to me.*

A moment of quiet passed through the clearing until Archangel grinned widely, placing a paw to his chest. "Oh, Chirpbark! I wish you would have told me earlier! If I am anything, I'm not *cruel*, isn't that right?"

No one had the energy to argue, too worn from the night's grief.

"I may be your leader, and I may feel the need to discipline those who go out of their ways to disrespect me, but I am not going to place new and expecting mothers in danger. I'm higher than that; I'm *better* than that." Archangel showed his teeth in a smile, tail flicking. "Chirpbark, your loyalty has been noted. Don't worry about stepping in; I've taken our chat into consideration, and our interesting conversation has given you some brownie points! Only your other Clanmates have to be punished. I'm sure that's not a problem for you, though, is it?"

The relief Chirpbark felt nearly overshadowed the humiliation of Archangel's mention of their talk, right before Waspstar's death - the best chance Chirpbark would've gotten to kill Archangel. But the only time he'd ever killed was when it was personal, and Archangel hadn't ever done anything to him, at least not to his family - and not to his own skin. *Friends aren't family.* Waspstar, no matter how much he wanted it to be true, was not Chirpbark's brother. Sparrowblaze and Slap, on the other paw, *were* family, and Chirpbark would protect them to his last breath.

"Th-thank you," Chirpbark finally said, continuing to ignore the angry stares of his Clanmates. "I... I appreciate that, Archangel."

And as he stepped back, as his chosen Clanmates were rounded up into the empty elders' den, a plan formed in Chirpbark's mind. A plan that, no matter how morally flawed, *had* to work. As long as he could protect his blood, Chirpbark would do anything - and if that meant growing close to Archangel, well, then he could live.

He just hoped that, one day, his Clanmates would finally understand.

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Hey, guys! Welcome to the prologue of *Blood Moon* , which I'm

really excited to get out to the world! I hope you guys enjoyed, and don't worry, we'll really be exploring more of the cast next chapter!

Who are you guys excited to see? What do you think will happen next? I'd love to hear what everyone thinks! Thanks so much everyone, and most of all, huge shoutout to Alina, aka lovelorn-burnings , for being a motivator for me, a helpful hand in the planning of this story, and my beta reader! Go give her a follow if you aren't already.

Thanks for reading, and as usual, may SpiritClan light your paths!

Up next: Snakeleap deals with his new life in EchoClan. Meanwhile, talk of a rebellion rises within the subordinates.

Chapter 1: Snakeleap

[image]

CHAPTER ONE
snakeleap

Morning light fluttered into the warriors' den, splattering honey-golden rays into Snakeleap's eyes. The tom groaned softly, pearly white claws sinking into the soft ground underpaw, a headache pounding in his temple.

Every day started the same; wake up, deal with the camp guards, talk to his friends, see Slap if possible, go on patrol, have the last pick of the fresh-kill-pile, and sleep.

It was exhausting. Snakeleap could practically feel how brittle his bones were. He lifted himself to his paws, shaking dust from his pelt, and slowly stepped forward, wincing. His head was on fire and his legs moved slowly; Snakeleap wasn't sure if it was the side affect of grief, or something else entirely. He knew he should confide in Slap, talk to his mate about how horrible he'd been feeling, but Snakeleap wasn't sure he had it inside of him to. *And we used to be so close...*

A lump formed in Snakeleap's throat, stinging his eyes with tears. He quickly swallowed down the weakness, trying to breathe, but the overwhelming thoughts were nearly too much to handle.

It'd been nearly six moons since the death of his brother. Six agonizing moons of grief and despair, six moons since Archangel took over EchoClan. Several changes had been implemented to his Clan, and sometimes, when Snakeleap looked around, he wasn't sure he recognized his Clan at all. Everything felt foreign, like he was in a dream, except his dream was a nightmare that he could never escape from. Even when he slept, memories of Waspstar's death thrummed through his head, leaving him fully exposed to the

sneers and claws that came the next day. It was torture.

Snakeleap ducked through the sheet of vines tangled over the entrance of the warriors' den, gray eyes following the trail of tendrils snaking along the clay caves. He twitched his thin, splotched tail and shifted his gaze over toward the mouth of camp. A growl rumbled softly in his throat when he spotted Archangel sitting peacefully next to the oak leader's den, white paws tucked comfortably beneath his fur. Next to him stood a huge black tom, scars crisscrossing over his matted pelt, dim amber eyes staring intently on Archangel.

Spiderstrike... After the takeover, Archangel brought in the black tom with little to no explanation. After two moons, Spiderstrike was made as Archangel's advisor, and the two were rarely seen apart from each other. Snakeleap didn't trust Spiderstrike with any bone in his body; any friend of Archangel's had to be as warped and diluted as he was. Though Spiderstrike hadn't distributed any signs of psychotic behavior, Snakeleap was waiting for something to happen, always watching the advisor with sharp gray eyes. *It's only a matter of time before he does something... and when it happens, I'll be here to stop it.*

Surprisingly, nothing too bad had happened since Archangel starved the pawful of EchoClanners after the takeover. The memory was still painful for Snakeleap, causing his claws to sink into the soft ground underneath him. Seeing his son forced into the elders' den, seeing the dead look in his eyes when Archangel had rounded those chosen cats into the middle of camp after three days... Snakeleap was sure he'd been completely broken.

Still, nothing truly compared to the grief surrounding his brother. While Waspstar hadn't always been an able and present leader, he'd been passionate about his Clan - and was always willing to risk himself for his Clanmates. In the end, though, Archangel's words punctured through Waspstar's walls, and his brother fell, taking the rest of EchoClan with him. Snakeleap could still remember the way his breath had hitched, how his body had frozen the moment he saw his brother's blood staining the ground. Blades of grass had bent under his orange paws as he raced forward, slamming past Chirpbark, pushing into Waspstar's flank.

Snakeleap forcefully shoved himself out of the memory, shaking his pelt loose of those terrible thoughts. He swallowed the bile in his throat and continued walking, paws shaking with every step. He ripped his gaze away from Archangel and Spiderstrike, next landing on a pawful of other cats that made his claws unsheathe- the camp guards.

Archangel had implemented a new rank into EchoClan shortly after the takeover. *Camp guards,* he called them, were Archangel's most loyal and oldest followers. They had more power over their other Clanmates, guarded the camp at night, and had free leisure to smack around any cats they wanted. Snakeleap, being Waspstar's brother, was often receiving the blunt of their torture.

There were also the subordinates, cats who Archangel had deemed too close to Waspstar and EchoClan to be a full warrior- cats like Swiftspeck, Dimflare, Birdcry, and even Chirpbark. If they proved their loyalty, they could become full warriors and have more freedom, but very few refused to. Therefor, they were stuck in camp surrounded by camp guards, or closely watched throughout the territory, given absolutely no privacy at all just in case anyone tried to run off. Snakeleap hated it, even more so because he was not only a subordinate but also the brother of Waspstar - a very likable target to the camp guards.

He quickened his pace to try and slide away without detection, but Stag - one of the camp guards - quickly noticed him, green eyes lighting up considerably. She flicked Wolf's flank and alerted him of Snakeleap's presence, and in a mere matter of seconds, the two were bounding over towards their first victim of the day.

SpiritClan, give me strength, he prayed.

"If it isn't old Snakeleap!" Wolf chirped, a smile making its way on his cheeks.

"Welcome to the land of the living," Stag snickered, poking fun at Snakeleap's late start, "Have any dreams? Talk to *SpiritClan*?"

Snakeleap lashed his tail, turning away from the two, ears flattening on his head.

Wolf's gaze grew hard. "Answer her!" he snapped loudly, slamming a huge gray paw into the side of Snakeleap's head. The orange tom whined when he hit the ground, body aching from the impact. A shadow crossed over his vision as Wolf stuck his muzzle in Snakeleap's face. "So, did you? Have any dreams, I mean? I sure hope it was about your old leader; so sad he can't save his poor little EchoClanners." Wolf cackled, leaning back. "You should've been there, boss. The look on Waspstar's face when he gave up..."

The words settled into Snakeleap's heart, and almost instantly his fur began to bush. He *hated* the way those mangy fox-hearts talked about his brother, hated them for their blinding loyalty to Archangel and constant abuse towards Snakeleap. What had he ever done to them? Simply lived? Was that enough to face their cruel words and claws for the rest of eternity?

The black hole swallowed everything inside Snakeleap, numbness creeping up his skin. As a younger cat he might have been able to cry, but now, Snakeleap was empty. Snakeleap was aged. He'd seen so much heartache and sorrow in his life, and sometimes wished there to be no more. But in Archangel's world, death and destruction seemed to follow everywhere; there was simply no room for anything else.

Swallowing down his pride, Snakeleap grit his teeth and pulled himself to his paws. The headache grew worse, pounding behind his eyelids, ears buzzing with pain. "Is that all?" he asked curtly, stomach rumbling with hunger. Snakeleap didn't want to push the camp guards any further, but knew any tone he used could be found as disrespectful.

Wolf glared at him, mangled tail lashing. In a mere matter of seconds the brute tom's paws were sinking into Snakeleap's shoulders, pressing him deep into the earth. "Now, is that any way to talk to your superior, *Snakeleap*? You're done when I say you're done! Do you understand?"

Snakeleap could feel the fight leave his body; his bones ached from Wolf's grip, and although he hated it, Snakeleap knew he needed to appease his... *superior*. "I'm sorry," he said softly, "I understand."

Stag snickered. "You'd better understand. Who do you think you are, talking back to us? You look no better than a waif!"

"*Hey*!" a voice snapped from the edge of the clearing. Snakeleap slumped under Wolf's grasp, both relieved and worried; he was glad someone was defending him, but worried that this cat would be hurt in the process. "Leave him alone!"

Stag's gaze whirled into a look of pure, absolute hatred. "What do *you* want, *Dungflare*?"

"Leave Snakeleap alone," Dimflare growled, stalking up next to his fellow subordinate. "He didn't do anything to you!"

Snakeleap looked up and watched in horror as Wolf lashed out, claws scraping against Dimflare's cheek. A soft hiss filled the clearing and Dimflare recoiled back, tail lashing around his feet. Wolf made a quick move again but stopped mid-air, laughing when Dimflare flinched. "C'mon," Wolf said, turning to his mate. "I bet Archangel will want to send out patrols soon." The two camp guards padded off without another word, making their way to their leader's side.

The former deputy was heaved upward by strong paws and groaned, turning gray eyes to Dimflare. "What was that?" Snakeleap asked, attempting to be stern; his voice didn't carry through, though, only echoing with apathy. "It's dangerous to argue- stop doing it."

Dimflare blinked empty green eyes at Snakeleap, giving nothing away. "I respect you, Snakeleap, and I still see you as my deputy." His voice dropped. "But I know how to take care of myself."

Snakeleap shook his head slowly, eyes wrenching shut with pain. "You'll get yourself killed." The headache pounded back in his temple, pushing along the edge of his head.

"Are you okay?" Dimflare demanded.

"Fine," Snakeleap rasped.

"Mhm... come on. I'll bring you to Minktalon."

"No. I'm fine." Snakeleap jerked out of Dimflare's grasp, opening his eyes. He spotted a rivulet of blood trailing down the side of Dimflare's face, dripping crimson through his fur. "I'll come with you, though. You should get that checked on." *I need to see Slap, anyway.*

Dimflare hesitated, claws flexing, then nodded. "Fine." He briskly turned and paused, waiting for Snakeleap to begin walking, then fell in line with his former deputy. The medicine den yawned open a black tunnel screened by lichen, entangled vines streaking the outside of the clay exterior. The scent of herbs was strong as Snakeleap entered; he blinked rapidly, gaze adjusting to the darkness, and spotted the medicine cats.

Minktalon was working with Lilypaw, questioning her about herbs and their uses. On the other side, Slap was adjusting a set of berries and leaves, brows furrowed in concentration as he delicately separated fresh herbs from old herbs. Snakeleap blinked at his mate, wanting to approach him, but his legs were too weary. Besides, Dimflare needed tending to.

Lilypaw was the first to notice them. Her blue eyes widened slightly and she quickly tapped Minktalon's shoulder. "Snakeleap and Dimflare are here," the smaller she-cat said softly, pointing toward the mouth of the cave.

Both Minktalon and Slap turned, fixing their gazes on the two subordinates. Snakeleap blinked at Slap, trying to silently communicate with his mate, but the pale brown tom turned and continued tending to the herbs. Frowning, Snakeleap reluctantly turned away and padded over to Minktalon. "Camp guards again," he said, timbre soft and gravelly. "Would you mind tending to Dimflare?"

Minktalon dipped her head. "Of course."

Snakeleap noticed that most former EchoClanners still treated him with the respect of a deputy, but he truly wasn't sure why. Archangel was leader and Snakeleap had failed his Clan - and his brother. Why did cats still look up to him? The emotion must've shown on his face, because Minktalon was motioning over to Slap.

"Go talk to him, we'll go outside," she whispered in his ear, brushing comfortingly against his side as she passed him to tend to Dimflare.

His heart in his throat, Snakeleap took a burning step toward his mate. They'd been having more problems than usual recently, but instead of arguing, Slap usually gave Snakeleap the cold shoulder or a bout of passive aggression. Snakeleap knew it was because of his worsening depression, as well as the way EchoClan had turned out under Archangel's rule - he and Slap could hardly spend time together, and neither were allowed to leave camp without one or two camp guards present. It was infuriating at first, but turned into a dull throb that only pierced behind Snakeleap's eyes now. He didn't know what to do. He couldn't save Waspstar - how could he save his relationship?

"Slap," Snakeleap finally said, sliding next to his mate, gray gaze soft and sad. "How are you?"

Slap didn't look up. "Fine," he mumbled, sorting the rotted herbs into a small circular pile.

Snakeleap's heart ached with something akin to hope. "Any word from..." He looked around before pressing closer to Slap. "SpiritClan? From... from Waspstar?"

Slap sidestepped, creating a gap between the two. "No, Snakeleap," he growled softly, finally looking up, gaze reflecting with hurt. "Haven't I told you enough times? No one has contacted me. Not SpiritClan, not your brother, not Fallenholly or Pale or..." He choked on his breath. "Flickerpaw...Okay? Are you happy?"

Snakeleap screwed his eyes shut, listening closely, wondering where everything had gone wrong. Becoming deputy? Archangel coming to the Clans? All the deaths, his possession? Looking at how horribly hurt his mate was only served to make Snakeleap even more desperate. In a way, he felt like their damaged relationship was allowing Archangel to win, but Slap couldn't seem to forgive him. It hurt, raw and tender, but Snakeleap understood. He was being pushy, especially about SpiritClan, but couldn't Slap see he just wanted answers? Just wanted something to save EchoClan with? A sliver of hope?

"I'm sorry," Snakeleap finally breathed, re-opening his eyes and gazing softly at his mate. "I didn't mean to upset you."

Slap frowned, looking slightly surprised. He opened and closed his mouth, seemingly trying to decide on something to say, before his eyes filled with an emotion Snakeleap absolutely hated. *Pity*.

"It's okay," Slap said. "I didn't mean to snap. It's just...you always come in here, asking me about SpiritClan, yet you never ask about *me*. Never ask how *I'm* doing. It...hurts, Snakeleap. I wish I could give you the answers you seek, but you have to find those for yourself. They're inside you; I'm not the one that can give you the solution."

Emotion filled Snakeleap's throat, so much so that he had to swallow it down just to breathe. When he looked at Slap all he could see was what EchoClan once was- what it had been under Waspstar's rule, how happy he and Slap had been. The thoughts sent prickles of tears into his eyes, causing the former deputy to turn his head away. He tasted bile and saw Waspstar, bleeding out beneath his paws, over and over and over again.

"He's my brother," Snakeleap finally said, filling the silence. "Waspstar...he's my brother, and he died. I failed him." The orange tom fixed his gray gaze on the kind, round eyes of his mate and everything came spilling over. "I...I couldn't...I couldn't save him, Slap, I couldn't- I failed him, I failed him and now he won't speak to me!" The panic hitched in his voice and Slap nimbly rushed forward, brushing his tail over Snakeleap's muzzle.

"Shhh," Slap whispered softly, paranoid but concerned. "C'mon, let's go further into the den."

Snakeleap numbly followed, the intense notions far too much to handle. The anxiety was stabbing spikes into his stomach and he continued mindlessly blabbering on, voice hushed but still horrified. "I failed him, Slap, he won't talk to you or me or anyone because I let him down, oh, he must be so angry..." The cave shifted into shivering trees, and when Snakeleap looked down he saw blood coating his fur, saw Waspstar's broken body strewn beneath his claws. A whine ripped from his throat, and everything felt cold, so

cold so cold so cold-

And then there was warmth. Something beside him, a shape, a bundle of fur that was filled with such intense concern Snakeleap was completely pulled out of his flashback. When the memory glazed over, he realized he was on the floor of the cave, tail wrapped around his body and paws on his head. But there was still that warmth... Looking to the side, Snakeleap managed to make shaky eye contact with Slap, and his eyes once more filled with tears. "Slap?"

Slap looked heartbroken for some inexplicable reason. Then, "Why didn't you ever tell me it got this bad?"

Snakeleap frowned, slightly confused. "Bad...?"

"I've never seen you have a flashback like that before..." Slap brushed his muzzle forward and pressed his nose into Snakeleap's cheek.

"It wasn't that bad," the former deputy murmured, staring down at his paws. His first flashback had been the worst, but even now the memories still haunted Snakeleap. He couldn't let go of his brother's death. He wasn't sure he ever could.

Slap didn't respond for a moment, still slumped in the same position, nestled close to his mate. Finally, after another several heartbeats, Slap asked, "Do you really feel that way? About Waspstar?"

Snakeleap bit back the snap of, *Yes! Of course I feel that way!* But Slap was right to be anxious, and Snakeleap was aware that his state of mind wasn't entirely healthy right now. But the silence was stretching thin and Snakeleap needed to respond before he worried Slap further. "Yes," he said, squeezing his eyes shut. "I do. I failed him." He choked on his breath and bent his head, chest swirling with agony.

Slap placed a paw on Snakeleap's chin and lifted his head, causing his eyes to slide open. "Hey. Look at me...None of this is your fault. Okay?"

"But...but I was his *deputy*-"

"If Chirpbark had still been his deputy would you have blamed him for Waspstar's death?"

Snakeleap frowned. "Of course not..!" And then he realized what Slap was saying, and his ears heated up with embarrassment. "It's...it's different. I was his *brother*."

"Chirpbark was his best friend, and yet you still would not blame him like you blame yourself." Slap blinked, tilting his head. "You've run out of excuses, Snakeleap. I don't know why you hold yourself accountable, but if you're going to push blame on someone then push it on *Archangel*. He's the one who..." Slap breathed in shakily. "*He* hurt your brother, okay? So stop taking responsibility for something you didn't cause, and start understanding that the only cat to inculpate here is Archangel."

Snakeleap stared at his mate, shocked at the words but letting them sink in. When he thought about it, it made sense. While he did blame Archangel, he realized he blamed himself even more. Maybe it's because he was so *tired*, so *upset*, and seeing the determined gazes of EchoClan's young warriors hurt more than anything. H wanted to scream at them to stand down, but nothing would come out because then he'd be letting them down. And Snakeleap couldn't do that. He was their last link to Waspstar, and he wasn't helping anyone by moping around and being depressed all the time. He needed to step up. He needed to show his Clanmates - the ones that had *always* been loyal to his brother - how to express themselves without getting punished, or worse, killed. They needed his help, and Snakeleap was going to give it to them.

Archangel wouldn't stand a chance.

Snakeleap opened his mouth to reply, but a presence at the mouth of the cave stilled him in his tracks. "You've been in here long enough," a voice growled. When Snakeleap turned, he spotted a tabby calico she-cat glaring daggers at both he and Slap. "Now get up! Patrols are being called out soon!"

Quickly obliging, Snakeleap pushed himself to his paws and shot a

look at Slap that contained everything he couldn't express right now - appreciation, love, and even a small hint of determination. Slap's lips upturned into a smile and he flicked his tail, rising to his paws as well. "Go on," he said, voice soft and emotionless, gaze contrasting everything his tone held, "you'd best be off, Snakeleap."

The former deputy dipped his head. "Thank you." He turned on his paws and spotted Crew staring at them with a look of contempt. She said nothing, however, and lead the way out of the medicine den, passing by Minktalon and Lilypaw. "Go sit with your vermin," Crew spat, motioning toward a group of subordinates gathered next to the apprentice's den.

Snakeleap clenched his teeth but only nodded, forgetting about his headache as he padded over to some of his closest Clanmates. Dimflare, Cloverpool, Applefall, and Snowblaze stood side by side, talking quietly amongst themselves. Snakeleap straightened his shoulders and joined the group, pausing to glance at Dimflare. The pink scratch lined against his cheek stood out against his ginger fur, but Minktalon had patched it up well enough for it not to scar. "Are you feeling okay?" Snakeleap asked softly, still concerned about the young warrior- or, subordinate.

Dimflare nodded. "I'm fine," he said dismissively, then blinked. "What about you?"

"Fine," Snakeleap lied, remembering his headache from before. Still, he had to listen to Slap's advice - he had to be strong for his Clanmates. Though, the subordinates looked slightly suspicious, and Snakeleap narrowed his eyes. "What were you talking about earlier?"

There was a heartbeat of silence until Breezestorm joined the group, ears pricking when he picked up on Snakeleap's question. The gray tom exchanged a glance with Applefall and Snowblaze.

Snakeleap's tail twitched but he quickly soothed his emotions, not wanting to appear suspicious. "Well?" His deputy tone slipped out, causing every subordinate to clench their muscles and duck their heads.

"We have a plan," Breezestorm finally said, voice low and gravelly. Thankfully, the camp guards seemed to be talking amongst themselves, and every other group was sitting too far away to hear.

Snakeleap narrowed his eyes. "A plan? What do you mean?" Hope flared in his chest, but was quickly replaced by apprehension and worry.

Breezestorm picked up on the former deputy's anxiety and shook his head. "Don't worry, okay? And don't freak out either, but... we have a plan to escape EchoClan and start a rebellion."

The world went quiet around Snakeleap. His eyes widened ever so slightly, posture taking a shocked stance. "You mean..." He suddenly couldn't find his voice, as if it were buried under a pile of rubble in his throat. "A way out? A way- a way to save ourselves?"

Applefall nodded, placing his tail on Snakeleap's shoulder. "We've been planning it for a while. I'm sorry we didn't tell you, but we know how upset you've been about Waspstar...We didn't want to add any more stress."

Emotion swept into Snakeleap's lungs until he felt he couldn't breathe. "What's the plan?"

Breezestorm flicked his tail. "If anyone in this group is placed on patrol together, we're going to escape to the Moontunnels and set up camp. Then we'll find a way to get everyone back, one by one. *No one* will be left behind. And once we're all together...well," Breezestorm smirked, "Archangel won't stand a chance."

Snakeleap smiled, gray eyes shining with tears. "We're going to make it out," he breathed, and when he gazed upon Breezestorm he could see this cat growing into a fine, young leader. *Galestorm and Lilybark would be so, so proud.* "We're going to get EchoClan back..."

The group continued quietly discussing the plan, but there was something they didn't notice- a shape slinking in the shadows of the apprentice's den, green gaze sharply watching the cluster of subordinates. And as the plan was laid out in full detail, the warriors completely unaware of the eavesdropper, the gears began

turning in Flamepaw's mind...

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Yay! New chapter in and I'm going to start consecutively updating every Monday! Get ready for next chapter, because things are finally starting to go down!

What do you think? Who do you think we'll be seeing next chapter? Who are you excited to see? Tell me your thoughts! I'd love to hear! Thanks for reading everyone, and may SpiritClan light your path!

Up next: Talk of the rebellion buzzes into action.